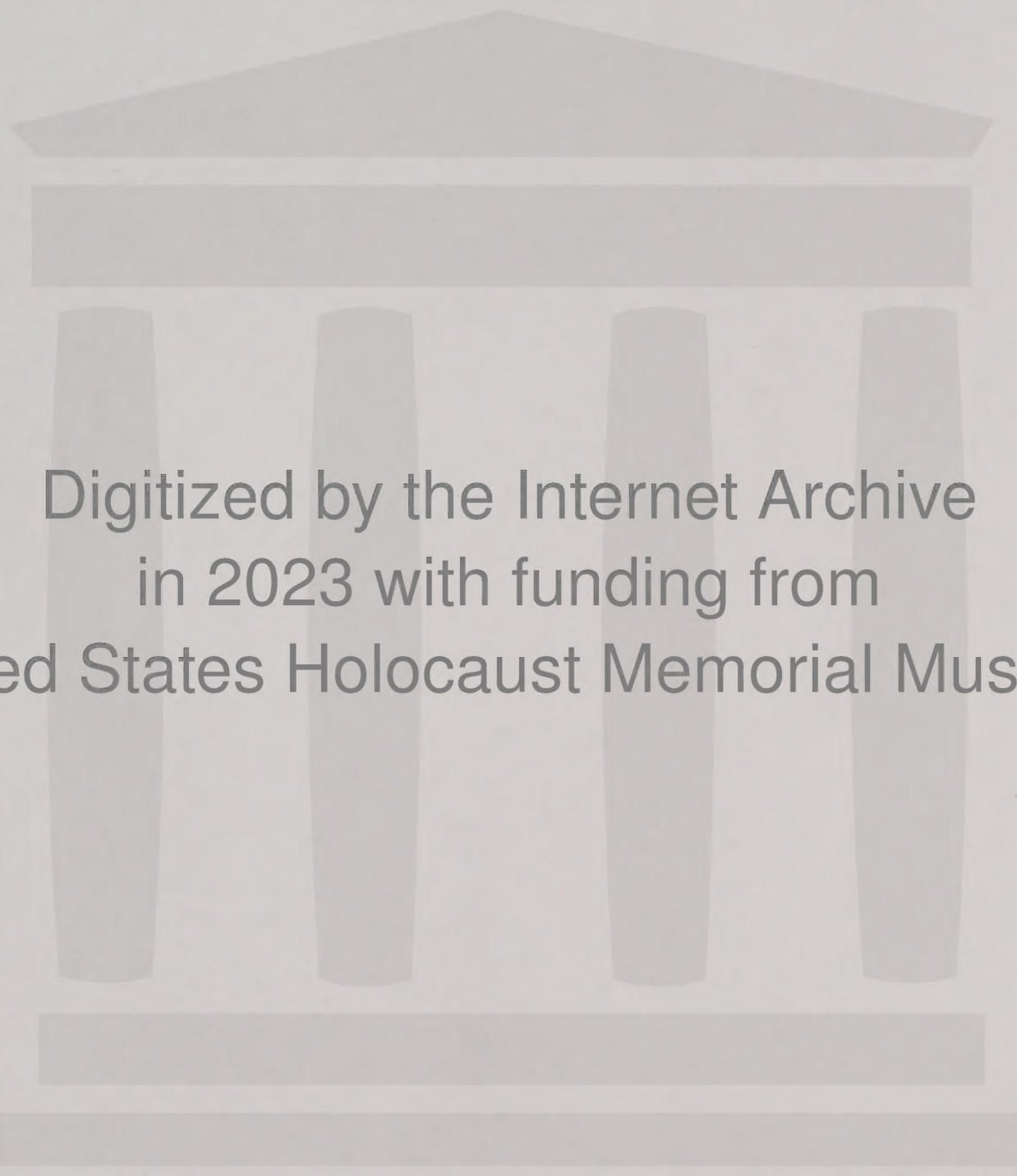




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Alex Alexander

* | Kristallnacht
Intern camp in England

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A. ALEXANDER

New York, December 5, 1955

My Growing Up and Other Memories

Werther and its lovely surroundings is my birthplace. I remember it well as seen from the Egge. I spent a very happy childhood surrounded by the love and protection of my parents and with my brothers and sisters.

At the end of my fourteenth year it was necessary to consider my future profession. Someone at the time suggested for me to learn a trade. My parents and I agreed that I should become a tailor.

A competent master tailor in Werther took me on. During the first summer season we had so little work, though, that I left after six months.

I then took up another apprenticeship at Schulz's in Bielefeld for one year. It subsequently turned out that that was far too short a time. Although I took great trouble to learn fast, there was much left that had not been learned. Only years of practice will make a really first-class made-to-order tailor. At the age of fifteen-and-a-half I went to Frankfurt-am-Main to attend a course in cutting. I had my meals with a married cousin, Edler, and rented a room near him. Here I came to grief, literally, in the first night. There was a crash, and when I woke up in the morning, I saw that one of the legs of the bed had broken.

Another big city event made a deep impression on me, one that I never forgot. The following event took place: In the street I hear a terrific noise. The fire brigade comes rushing along, four-in-hand, or even six, bells ringing, horses' hooves stamping, with a full complement of men. Suddenly one horse falls. All men jump off, busying themselves around the horse. The horse gets up. All men get back. The fire brigade rushes on

its way. All this took place at such a pace, I was stunned. I suppose I compared it to the exercises of the fire brigade at the Spritzenhaus in Werther, which I had enjoyed watching as a boy.

On the huge stage of the opera house I saw the drama "Wilhelm Tell." As I knew already a great deal of the play by heart, I was enchanted. My enthusiasm knew no bounds when a real horse was brought on the stage.

After the completion of the three month course in cutting-out I hoped to obtain a post as a cutter by kind recommendation of my principal. He shattered my hopes, though, by telling me I was too young. I therefore returned to my master in Bielefeld. Not too long afterwards I was driven once more by wanderlust, and ended up in Elberfeld. My teacher, Herr Weingarten lived there. The environs of Elberfeld and Barmen pleased me so much that I seriously considered setting up in business on my own one day. But things turned out differently.

After I worked there for another half a year I continued my training at the firm of the Brothers Rosenthal in Annen, recommended by Herr Hesse, a friend of my father's. One of their sons, then a grammar school boy, became Aunt Leni's fiancée, but died during their engagement.

I cannot remember whether I was tired of tailoring, or my parents thought I should get some business experience, in any case I became an unpaid assistant in a drapery store in Dortmund, where I stayed for eighteen months. I remember the following event. I was helping to pass sheets of glass from a glass roof for cleaning. After one broke noisily on the floor one could hear the voice of the boss calling from the cash desk, "Who is going to pay for that?"

My first position as a salesman was with the Brothers Alsberg in Solingen. While there I often visited a cousin of my mother's, a family called Moses. The head of the family was

referred to as "The Duke of Solingen" because of his great wealth.

At that time it was usual for the sales staff to live in at the place of work. For lack of space two other gentlemen and I had to sleep next door. One morning I wanted to know the time; I reached for my watch in my waistcoat pocket, where it had last been, but it was not there any more; nor was my coat. Herr Haehnlein, that was the name scratched in the lid of my watch, had been very considerate, he had not disturbed either of us in our slumber. But perhaps he only wanted to ascertain whether we could manage without these bits of our property. To make light of his work he had found the front door of the house and the door of our room unlocked. He did not have such an easy time of it on a subsequent nocturnal visit. He was caught and brought to trial. The judge decided for my property to be returned to me.

In order to do my military service in the neighborhood of Bielefeld, I volunteered in that town. It was the same regiment in which my father had served during three campaigns.

When I came home on leave on Sundays it was always a special feast day for my parents, my brothers and sisters, and of course for me!

During my time as a recruit I entertained my brothers with many tales of a soldier's life, (some things seemed strange and even ridiculous to me,) and I mimicked some of it, too. I found a most appreciative audience. One exercise which Uncle Hugo, with his powerful voice, liked to copy is still with me. The guard in front of the barracks had to shout "Out" with all his might when an officer on day duty approached so that the rest of the men could stand to attention. This call with a cupped hand over the mouth was often repeated by the brothers and added to the fun of those days.

The walk to and from Bielefeld took two hours, up and down hill, and was usually completed singing or whistling. The idea of taking the stagecoach for that distance never entered my head. During the first weeks of my military service I was given an order by the corporal, which I found funny, and I laughed. In order to forget the humor of it I was made to march with a spring board strapped to my back round the Kaiser-Wilhelmsplatz!

One year later my uncle Arnold served in the same regiment.

I was glad when the military life came to an end. Now I could apply for a cutter's course, which I had long coveted. I had become such friends with Herr Schulz in the meantime, that he offered to give me any recommendation I wished for. I took him up on that valuable offer, and even dictated some myself. Consequently I very quickly found a good job. Herr Loeb was the owner of a well established business. From the very beginning I was determined to develop the made-to-order side of it, and became very successful in that. I recommended Uncle Julius to be taken on as a salesman. He worked together with Herr Hamburg, who became a great friend of the family. He lived in Essen for years, later as a very wealthy man in Holland, his homeland. When Hitler invaded Holland he fled to my brothers in Brazil.

After a year a second cutter was taken on. I shall have to deal more closely with that gentleman. It was he who made the suggestion that we should give up our jobs and start in business on our own. As Herr Seligmann was a competent man I agreed with his suggestion.

We had to consider that I was under contract not to open a business of my own nor visit customers within five miles of the place of work. For that reason we rented a few rooms on the first floor of a house in Oberhausen.

On December first I left with a month's salary in my pocket, and had no inkling what Herr Loeb had in mind.

I went straight to Neuss, to Uncle Moses and Aunt Emilie, which was like my second home. They were exceptionally good and honest people, the kind of relations to whom we as a family had the closest ties. Sadly the family was struck down by a terrible tragedy during the war, when they lost both their most promising sons, our cousins. Their descendants are Aunt Ida and Uncle Rudolph in Sao Paulo. Your Aunt Lena lived with them while attending high school.

In Neuss I began my self employed existence. I sold custom made clothing.

As my letters to Herr Seligmann had remained unanswered I went over to see him, to make certain our agreement stood. No. Herr Loeb had persuaded him to stay in the firm, probably with increased wages. Thus I got to know the character of Herr Seligmann. I remembered Schiller's word in the "Raeuber" - "A scoundrel, who does not keep his word." Later I was very glad I did not work with such a man, and remained my own master.

How Essen Became the Town of My Independence

I had hardly heard the news that I was not committed any more when I went back to Neuss. On the train I met an acquaintance. I asked him whether he knew of a town in the area suitable for my purpose. He mentioned Essen and at that moment Essen became my new home. The landlord of the already rented rooms in Oberhausen and I came to a speedy and amicable arrangement. Full of all my news, I went back to my relations in Neuss and the very next morning to Essen.

I rented two unfurnished rooms at No. 24 Grabenstrasse for the first of January, 1903. The larger was meant to be the business part, the smaller one my bedroom. There was no luxury about it all, and my way of life was not affluent. Uncle Hugo, who arrived that spring to attend the upper Realschule, is a

witness to that. I can still see it now, how Uncle Hugo, dressed in one of my hand-me-down suits, ran across the street to buy boiling water to make coffee with, for one or two pfennige. Uncle Hugo trotted through back alleys, cutting corners to save time.

In order to start my business I asked two firms known to me to let me have salesmen's samples. I did not need a store room. As I stood in good credit I had no need to touch my savings of 3000 marks. Over the Easter holidays, sales became so good that I had to engage a second cutter after only a few weeks. But I did not know the meaning of an eight hour day!

Looking back now I must say that this chapter of my life, the first and rapid growth of my own business, became the greatest joy of my life. Added to the enjoyment was the fact that I could report my success to the parents and the brothers and sisters, year after year.

After a further six months I moved to some small business premises at Grabenstrasse 40. There I added ready-to-wear gentlemen's clothes to the made-to-order tailoring. Both could be displayed in the shop windows. At that time Uncle Julius joined me to run the store and stayed with me for several years. Uncle Fritz became apprenticed to the Brothers Alsberg in Essen and visited us frequently. That was a lovely time for us four brothers. And for our parents a great reassurance to know that we were all together, away from home as we were. From time to time we received most welcome food parcels. Especially Mother's pickled gherkins were most popular. At the top of the house was the bedroom Uncle Julius and Uncle Hugo slept in. The furniture was not exactly precious. I suspect it was made mostly of boxes. But nobody minded much. And their college friend, Van Gemper, visited them frequently up there.

After an interval of another four years I looked for larger premises. I do not know whether it was strictly necessary or

whether I was bent on improving things. I could not get what I wanted, for I bought the business house No. 26 Grabenstrasse. At the Limbecker Platz, in the direct vicinity, was the department store Althof in the process of construction. I could therefore count on much improved trade in the area. The price of the house was 70,000 marks, and rose with much-needed alterations to 100,000. The first floor, which had been a flat, was used for the business as showrooms for the much enlarged "Boys' and Gentlemen's outfitters." The second floor was used by us for our private use, and the third had the workshops for the tailors, their living quarters, and later additional storage space.

I believe it was at the opening of the new premises in 1907 that Aunt Hanna joined us. Her main occupation was to see that the customers were served politely and amicably, and their money taken in a friendly manner. She warned reluctant payers, and paid the manufacturers - this is called "Regulieren."

The interest, the industry and the stamina Aunt Hanna brought to the business can not be surpassed. But she cared equally well for the running of our household and excellent cooking. Up to the outbreak of the first world war, 1914, I visited customers from Monday until Friday. For the home-based part of the business I employed salesmen. If I am not mistaken the turnover at that time was well over 100,000 marks per year.

Uncle Arnold, who had been busy in the parental cattle business, was being persuaded by the parents to try his luck with me. I, on the other hand, was very pleased, unconsciously proud even to help my brother and give such pleasure to my parents.

As soon as I had introduced Uncle Arnold to his new activity he tried to find customers himself, as far as possible. His success exceeded all expectations.

I believe the accounts were made up in such a way that Uncle Arnold had the profit of his sales accredited to him, without

having the general business expenses set against it. After a reasonable lapse of time, Uncle Arnold became a partner in the firm and it was renamed "The Brothers Alexander" from just "A. Alexander."

In 1910 Uncle Arnold became ill with TB, and spent some time in various nursing homes. Then he went to Davos for eighteen months. Throughout this time I wrote daily to him, even if only postcards. In order to keep his illness from our parents, his letters from Davos were sent to us, then readdressed to Werther. Indeed we managed to keep his illness from the parents until he returned from Davos almost cured and spent some weeks of convalescence with them. While he stayed in Davos I visited him for three weeks in the company of Herr Hamburg.

In those days it was the usual business practice to open the shops on Sunday morning from eight to nine, and again from eleven to two. Afterwards we often went for excursions in the direction Ruttenscheidt-Werden. That was often a very jolly trip. We were accompanied by two charming ladies, of whom we saw a lot in those days. In the evening Aunt Hanna would have a delicious supper ready for the hungry roamers. The supper consisted mostly of potato salad and sausage, but that made a most satisfying end to the jolly outing.

One event has remained with me.

We sat in the Cafe Schapitz, in the Kettwigerstrasse with Uncle Hugo, who attended Bonn University. Uncle Hugo noticed how a Jewish law student in his final year, whom he knew personally, turned to a gentleman at the adjoining table and commented on some antisemitic remarks he had overheard. A little later I came into the cloakroom, where I found the two gentlemen facing each other. The lawyer said, "You said you would not fight with a Jew. Do you still stand by this remark?" The other man had hardly answered in the affirmative when he received a resounding slap on the face. And he was much bigger than his opponent. I

was shaken by it, and the thus treated had a bright red cheek. When I tried to leave the cloakroom the two men asked me to stay.

The antisemitic one had the duty as a lieutenant of the reserve to respond to a challenge or offer one within a certain time after the incident. After he had not done so, the lawyer notified the so-called court of honor.

I was called as a witness. I learned later that the man had given false evidence by stating he had attacked first by punching the lawyer in the stomach, before being slapped himself. Verdict: Expulsion from the Officers' Corps.

These beautiful, peaceful years came to an end on August first, 1914, just as I had ended a three-week holiday in Freudenstadt in the Black Forest.

On the first day of the general call-up I made my way back to Essen, not knowing which day it would be my turn to register. The train was crowded with all the men rushing back home to register. I had to stand most of the night. On arrival in Cologne the platforms were piled high with luggage. Coming home to Essen I looked up my military papers and found I had not got to register until the fourteenth day of the call-up. As a result of my holiday I was so tanned that I had to explain myself several times, being taken for a foreign spy!

On August the fourteenth we were driven in the military transport through Schwetzingen, unforgettable for its plum jam. From there on to Strassburg. There we were billeted in the Manteuffel Barracks. I had to busy myself in an army outfitters' depot. I was one of those who was declared fit for war service. During the last years of peace I had a light heart weakness, and was not fit for combat duty for the first year of the war. We selected ones were then sent to Buehl in Baden, where we stayed for a few months. Then we were sent to Kortrijk in Belgium, but again were not deployed but transported further, to France, and

sent, of all places, in front of the impenetrable fortress Verdun. This was in the spring of 1916.

The First Hours At the Front

Dark evening! Our detachment moved to the frontline positions. At first all went well, as by now one had gotten used to the heavy pack.

But the closer one gets to the enemy line, the less enjoyable it gets.

Stumps of trees, large holes made by grenades, bits of barbed wire lying around, make the marching in the dark very hazardous. As a bonus we get artillery fire.

With all those discomforts, I was quite glad when we reached the second line after hours of marching. This was in a wood. We stopped, and before I knew where I was, I was alone with one other man! Well, I thought this is war, and found fast shelter in a trench. These are underground passages to which some steps lead down. They were especially appreciated when it rained, like on that night, and the mud gets on all your clothes and makes them much heavier.

The following evening, we had to march into the forward positions to take over from the men there. The first line (front line) is directly opposite the enemy, and in this case ran through the wood. On arrival, a comrade and I looked for shelter for the night, and found a kind of hut, more like a dog kennel. One had to crawl into it, and then sit doubled up. Then we experienced an attack for several hours. The sound being conducted along the ground sounded so powerful that I expected my whole company to be annihilated. But in actual fact, and to my joy and relief, not a single man had been hurt. My comrade had been praying right through the night. Unfortunately, he was

killed later on. Since I had his wife's address, I wrote some beautiful and comforting words to her.

What I went through and saw in the subsequent war years was not pleasant, and I do not want to swell on it.

Only let me mention one thing. Since I knew no fear I survived the dangers and horrors of the war relatively well. My comrades admired me and said, "Alex, you really are calm, cool, and collected through all this."

In the very last days of the war I had the following experience. One comrade and I were given the order to guard a post moved during the night. I was to take the first two hours' watch, the other man the next two. My comrade asked me to let him do the first turn, to which I agreed. When my turn came, I learned that he had been killed by a direct hit.

A Happy Coincidence

My detachment arrived in Rumania, in the mountains. During the two weeks' journey there, we tried to make it as comfortable as possible for ourselves. I placed tent flaps right across the luggage racks in the train and slept extremely well like that. After eight weeks we were taken back to the Western front. As you were never told where you were, you had the so-called "latrine messages."

It was evening when we arrived at our destination. In the canteen I met a neighbor from the Grabenstrasse. To my greatest surprise he told me that Uncle Arnold was quite near. We went there at once. The joy of the reunion was immense, and later on we were so glad to spend some months near each other. Uncle Arnold, owing to his weakness, was declared only fit for garrison duty, and had a job as a station master of a small branch line. He lived in the railwayman's cottage by the side of the track and the country road where our quarters were.

When we were in the front line, about two hours further on, Uncle Arnold got quite worried at times, especially when he heard very loud firing.

On returning I often looked in on the station master, who had his individual rations, which he had to cook for himself. There were special treats now and then, like rabbit, or even coffee made with real coffee beans!

When the news of the armistice reached us, I had got separated from my company. With some others we made our way to the nearest railway station, Luxembourg. The train was so packed that I spent some time on the roof, I suppose only temporarily.

I arrived in Altessen and went straight to the barber to make myself respectable. Grandmother and Aunt Hanna were delighted that I had come home so promptly. Grandmother had come to live in Essen during the war. After a few hours Aunt Lina arrived from Gelsenkirchen to greet me, too. The other four uncles, who had been at the front, arrived later, if I am not mistaken.

Business life had become very strange to me, after having been away from it for four years. I could not make friends with the inferior materials. Almost all clothes were made of artificial fibers, partly even paper, and rationed as well.

During the first years after the war big contracts for the army were given out. Uncle Arnold, who had only been called up later on, was very busy in that line, and made large profits for the firm.

During the last years of the war Aunt Hanna had run the business single-handedly. Money lost its value more and more, and if one tried to avoid that as a business man, one got into conflict with the law. For business people it was a very unpleasant and upsetting time, and lasted several years.

In the spring of 1919 I met Mutti at the home of Weizenkorns. We had been friends with them for a long time. Mutti lived with Aunt Doris and Uncle Iwan since the death of her mother. From their home in Twistringen she had come to visit her aunt and cousin Milli Hochheimer.

We got engaged in June and married on November 20, 1919. We moved into a large and beautiful flat at the Limbecker Platz, very conveniently situated.

When Hannelore enlarged the family in February 1921, Uncle Erich sent a telegram in which he let it be known that he had counted on a son and heir! Mutti, slightly put out, answered in verse:

If the boy be a girl,
We shall be happy just the same
(that is as far as I remember.)

At Inge's arrival in August 1926 we were just a bit disappointed, but still happy to have two healthy daughters.

And today we are rejoicing in the happiness of our children, and enjoying our grandchildren.

A few years after the war, the firm Brothers Alexander rented some business premises at a very high rent. They were on the Limbeckerstrasse and the rebuilding alone cost 50,000 marks, followed by another some years later. But these changes made for far better showroom facilities, the turnover was good, and the expenses were soon set off by profit.

The business in the Grabenstrasse was given up, and the shop as well as the flat rented out. Aunt Hanna moved with Grandmother to Ruettenscheid, where Uncle Arnold lived too until he married.

I believe it was in 1919 when Uncle Julius and Uncle Fritz wrote from Berlin that they had the intention to open a made-to-order tailoring business, and which town could I recommend to

them. I suggested Gelsenkirchen, and the uncles agreed.

They rented some premises on the Bochumerstrasse. Owing to the industry and effort of the owners, the firm J. and F. Alexander developed in a few years to such a degree of success that a new shop in the Bahnhofstrasse was taken, near the Hotel zur Post.

Aunt Lina, who had moved away from Werther during the war, was constantly active at the two uncles' place, in Gelsenkirchen. Her greatest delight was to help needy people. For young people she had a special interest, and she loved you all like a mother.

One of the owners of the firm Gustav Carsch and Company, Gelsenkirchen, had been killed in the war, and Herr Kaufmann, Aunt Meta's father, looked for a new partner.

Uncle Julius and Uncle Fritz applied and joined the firm. Through innovations and large-scale advertising their turnover rose and rose.

When Uncle Hugo started his practice in Gelsenkirchen in 1920, the whole family Alexander were together in the area Essen-Gelsenkirchen. Family relations were always so good that one can not imagine anything more beautiful or harmonious.

It must have been in 1927 that Uncle Fritz moved to Duesseldorf. He had joined the affiliated firm of Carsch there, having been asked to do so.

At the same time, I took over his place at Carsch's Gelsenkirchen, and worked mostly in the wholesale part of it, at least at first.

Uncle Arnold ran the business in Essen, and we, too, moved to Gelsenkirchen.

Soon after the newly built Carsch's had been opened a variety store was started within the so-called sportshouse. For that another vast building scheme was necessary, which rendered the firm unprofitable until all was paid off. This is the firm founded by us four brothers, all of whom were in the same trade.

The same took place with the firm Benz, Essen, which was founded when Uncle Fritz returned from Duesseldorf. It was the ever-increasing antisemitism which forced the closure of that firm.

The unspeakable Hitler time reared its ugly head while we spent our holiday in Villingen (Black Forest).

One morning I went for a walk before breakfast along the village street. On the first telegraph pole I saw a poster with a large swastika, urging people to come to a public meeting that evening.

With the thought in mind of how this would upset Mutti if she happened to see it, I took out my scissors and scratched it off. I risked this because it was very misty and nobody could see me. Conscious of my deed I went back to the hotel, sat on the veranda, and read a book. After a short time someone came up to me and asked me whether I had destroyed the poster. I denied that, of course, with an innocent demeanor. Then my excitable questioner remarked, "If it comes out that it was you, you can look forward to something!" For one moment that made me a little nervous, and I thought of departure. But we stayed, especially as the leader of the local Nazis lived next door to the hotel.

About a year later I told Mutti the story, and the interesting fact was her view that the poster would not have upset her at all.

On April the first, 1933, we were afraid that the Jews would be forced to walk through the streets with posters, to cause our

businesses to be boycotted. For that reason we drove to Mutti's cousin in Wert, near Bocholt. I returned by myself.

During the following night the night watchman, who had to watch Carsch's too, rang the bell so loudly that I woke up. He called up to me that there was a thief on the premises, and I should come with him. Although I did not feel a great inclination, I went.

In front of the house of the firm Carsch I found a gang of teenage boys assembled. Now I knew what it was all about.

The boys said they had seen a thief in the shop windows, and forced me to go to the back of the premises to convince me. Of course, there was nobody there. In spite of that the Nazis forced me to come back to the Bahnhofsstrasse with them. Wisely I made my tormentors walk in front of me. Luckily I saw a policeman near Carsch's. I walked up to him and asked him to protect me as I was being followed. He did just that, but only to the passage. In the Von der Recke Strasse I still had undesirable company. When I was at last safely behind my front door I was so relieved that I got away unharmed, and that Mutti and you children had stayed at Aunt Martha's.

As soon as the Nazi-cell within the Carsch business had been formed, they demanded to negotiate only with me. I did not allow myself to be intimidated, but stood by our rights.

We had been persuaded to employ Jewish employees who could not find any jobs any more in Christian firms. Being questioned about that I asked the obvious question, "Do you deny us Jews any right to existence?" "Oh, yes, but it is not welcome," said Herr Van Helden.

We had a window dresser who had come from Berlin, where the Nazis did not rule quite as strictly as in Gelsenkirchen. This man ill advisedly touched a salesgirl standing above him on a

ladder by the ankle! As he was Jewish and the girl Christian, a big thing was made of that.

We learned that leaflets were to be distributed against our firm. We moved heaven and earth to prevent that, in vain. Uncle Julius and Uncle Fritz went off to Berlin that evening. On the following day, Herr Frank, our general manager, and I drove by car to Recklinghausen. When we had put our case, we were told that the president of the area council could be found in Muenster. There we learned that it was the chief constable who was responsible. After much waiting around, we were admitted. "This is a highly political affair," said this man, after we told him what had happened. The purpose of our journey was to prevent our windows from being smashed, and we said so. Then the following took place.

The great man took the receiver, spoke to the police in Gelsenkirchen, and said in our presence, word for word, "Here are two gentlemen from Carsch's in Gelsenkirchen, who are afraid that their shop windows will be smashed. See to it that nothing of that sort happens, otherwise we shall get all these foreign papers saying again we are barbarians!" We drove back reassured. The leaflets, or "hate papers" were distributed, the windows remained untouched, but the window dresser had to be sacked.

Our first cell leader was responsible for alterations in ladies' fashion. There were complaints that Herr Heinz never came into the showroom to see to customers himself when an alteration had to be made. I asked Herr Heinz to see me in my office. "If you are asked to come to the showroom to see a customer and do not do so, from now on, I shall dismiss you instantly for not doing your job." That worked!

Mutti had wanted to leave Germany at once in the early days of the Nazi regime. A certain Herr Stern, who lived only a few doors from us, did just that. Innumerable times did I hear Mutti say, "If ever I envied a man, it is Herr Stern." I, on the other

hand, was more optimistic, like most of my fellow Jews, and also too close to my homeland. In addition, I knew how hard it would be at my age and with the language difficulties to keep my family.

The Tenth of November, 1938

The bell rang very loudly at 5 o'clock in the morning. Mutti opened the door. I am asked to come to the police station. Great upset.

I get dressed. Inge comes into the bedroom. She cries and cries and wails. She calls out to the policeman, "My Daddy has done nothing, my Daddy has done nothing," but that does not help. I have to go with them. On saying goodbye I called out, "To the pure in heart, all is pure."

At the police station I learned all that had happened during that night. The synagogue set on fire, many Jewish homes demolished, their owners beaten up.

I met many well-known faces sharing my fate. Uncle Julius and Uncle Hugo did not seem to like our place, they were brought to Buer. Probably there was more room there. Naturally at our place there was an atmosphere of great depression. I, on the other hand, had accommodated myself, as usual, to the unavoidable. It struck me again how few people there are who can easily adjust themselves to any given situation, as I have always done. Altogether the whole of the Nazi time did not concern me all that much. I never felt humiliated, but on the contrary, very superior to all those plebes. Again during our emigration and afterwards, I never mourned our losses, but felt as rich as ever. The one thing I remember pleasantly from our imprisonment was our daily walk. We were led around the courtyard in a circle for about a quarter of an hour, one behind the other. That was quite funny.

Generally it was bearable. Mutti was allowed to visit me daily and bring me food and necessities.

When after five days we were asked who was willing to sell their businesses, probably every single prisoner volunteered, and we were released. Uncle Arnold was not so lucky. He stayed behind bars for three weeks.

At the business premises of Brothers Alexander all the windows were broken and the models damaged. But that was not enough for the Nazis; we were forced to pay ourselves for the replacements. The firm had to be given up. The sale of the firm was forbidden; the whole thing, with stores, had to be sold in its entirety.

Thus ended the business built up with so much industry and thrift.

After this heroic battle, there was nothing holding me in Germany any more.

The question, "Where to?" was not simple any more by this time. In our first panic the whole family bought themselves tickets for Trinidad, as there was not an affidavit needed. But when calm had been restored we dropped that plan.

How It Came About That We Obtained an Affidavit

Herr Drucker, who had worked for us, told Aunt Lina or Aunt Hanna how he obtained an affidavit. His mother had been looking through an old family photograph album, and came upon some photographs of a cousin long ago emigrated to the USA. He contacted these relations and could now go there. So the aunts got the idea they could do the same thing for us. The photograph we were concerned with had been taken in 1866 in Montgomery, Alabama. Uncle Hugo, who travelled daily to Cologne, looked for the family home of that cousin and asked for his or her present

address. Finally Uncle Hugo wrote to the synagogue in Alabama and put the problem before them. Then came the joyful news that a Mr. Dreyfuss, the son-in-law of the deceased cousin, would furnish us with an affidavit. Even if it turned out later that the American Consul in London was not satisfied with that particular affidavit, it had the enormous advantage of getting us a transit visa for England. After their emigration to the USA, Uncle Hugo and Aunt Leni tried again, with the result that Rabbi Hahn and Fritz Weil guaranteed our immigration. When, after the war, we received a cable asking us whether we were still willing to come, we were all willing, especially the children.

We are especially indebted to Aunt Leni, who made it possible for us to enjoy our stay in this beautiful and free country.

The preparation for our emigration had started quite early, as far as Mutti was concerned. In the first instance, she saw to it that all "black" money that did not go through the cash registers was forwarded to Amsterdam, through the good offices of Uncle Max.

That became of inestimable value.

Besides, Mutti took great trouble to buy anything for the crates (a.k.a. "lifts") to be shipped that could be of future use. She had seven or eight beds ready in the container, as she had the intention of renting rooms to contribute to our income. For your dowry, dear children, she bought the best that was obtainable.

I have always been so very sorry that Mutti had to suffer the loss of so many carefully chosen goods for this emigration.

Uncle Fritz was the first to go, illegally, to Brazil. That was in 1938. In 1939 Uncle Julius followed. Our registration number at the American Consulate was very high. That had been my fault. I had put in the application, but had forgotten to sign

it. According the state of things, we would have had to wait for another two to three years.

Mutti found that too long. I went to Hamburg and called at the Brazilian Embassy, but in vain. They had received different instructions meanwhile. If I am not mistaken, I obtained the private address of one of the higher officials, a lady, through Uncle Fritz. I have never in my life bribed anyone, or tried to do so, because I hate it so. This time I made an exception. Armed with a huge box of chocolates costing five marks, I went off. I got rid of the chocolates but did not achieve the desired effect.

In the emigration office in Essen I found out there was a chance to emigrate to Chile. Mutti found out that there were too many earthquakes. There was no bribery in this case.

But when the fortunate news arrived that there was a chance of a transit visa to England, Mutti left no stone unturned. We phoned Fritz; Bloomsbury House demanded a deposit of 700 pounds sterling. Uncle Max was called up, and as a matter of course went to Amsterdam at once to transfer the necessary funds. The visa was only valid for Mutti, Inge and myself. Hannelore had the choice to become a domestic servant or a nurse. We phoned Hannelore in Berlin, and she decided to become a nurse.

Now the most important thing was to get passports. In order to get those, you had to bring a paper from the income tax authorities that all outstanding taxes, even the very high special taxes on Jews, had been paid. Herr Utecht had given me an account for those, amounting to 88,000 marks.

In order to cover this vast amount I had signed the sale of the house Grabenstrasse 26 over to the tax office (that amounted to only 27,000 marks).

But we received our passports.

Whitsun, 1939 we received the disastrous news that the sale of the house had not been granted. There was no reason given. Later on I learned that the party had refused the sale on the ground that the purchaser was not a party member. After our emigration the house was sold nevertheless to the son of the original bidder, by Herr Utecht. If the income tax people had found out that the sale had not taken place, they would have withdrawn our passports again.

For that reason we had to hurry.

On the following morning I drove to Herr Utrecht, the administrator of Brothers Alexander, Ltd. I handed him a Power of Attorney for all that was left behind.

That very same day we drove to Aunt Martha in Wesel, whom we sadly were never to see again.

When we had seen the last of the damned Nazis, on the next day, we were all happy.

New York, September 29, 1958

My Existence As a Refugee in England

The seventh of June, 1939 was the day of our emigration. Our first aim was Amsterdam. We arrived towards evening and went to a hotel near the station. Just arrived Inge noticed that she had lost her handbag. That upset her greatly. Before our departure I had given the children some money to spend as they wished. Now all the precious things which had caused such anticipation was gone. I can well imagine that my dear little daughter did not go to sleep that quickly that night. For the hope to retrieve her loss vanished, as I ran back to the station, looked along the road we had taken, and went to the lost property office at the station itself, all in vain. The next morning I

insisted that the children go to the municipal lost property office and notify their loss. "Yes, only when it is lost do you realize its value" became true this time.

But oh joy, after quite an interval the handbag with its precious contents was forwarded to London, to all our joy.

In Amsterdam we visited Herr Sanders, who handed Mutti some of the jewelry deposited with him, as well as the shares of General Motors which Uncle Fritz had bought for us. I did not foresee how beneficial they would be to us one day. Unfortunately, the whole family Sanders has perished. On the next day we visited a friend of Aunt Martha's and spent a lovely afternoon there. That evening we boarded the boat that brought us to England from the Hook of Holland.

On arriving in London we were surprised not to find Fritz Goldschmidt at the station. Mutti phoned his house and was told he had expected us on an earlier train. But he came and took us to his flat. All the furniture there originated in the parental house. In a house across the road we rented one especially large room where we all slept, cooked and washed. Mutti was not happy with these unusual arrangements. She told Fritz that it was her intention to take boarders as soon as she could have her crates with the furniture. I think this caused Fritz to buy the house in Percival Avenue, together with Mr. McIntosh. Mutti was willing to run the house as a boarding house to gain experience. This she did so efficiently that all, among them Aunt Laura, believed we shared in the profit. In truth, we did not share in anything, directly or indirectly. For all her activity we just paid one pound a week for our room instead of the usual two. One day I challenged Fritz: I told him how he could bear to see his aunt work so hard for just one pound a week. He promised to speak to his partner, and that is where it remained. Mr. McIntosh, owner of a car Mark "antiquity" was very keen on a well tended lawn. He complained to Mutti that I neglected this task. It did not help him much to complain.

A few weeks after we moved in Herr and Frau Weizenkorn came to us. Then followed Uncle Edu from Prague, to start a factory for drinking straws with Fritz. But the war put a stop to that.

When Uncle Hugo announced his arrival, I tried to find reasonable rooms, for to live in our house would have been too expensive. After Uncle Hugo had lived in our neighborhood for a few weeks, they moved in; later uncle Max and Aunt Laura. That way all relations and close friends among us refugees came together under one roof.

All were very eager to learn English, all going to lessons. I believe it was Aunt Martha who persuaded me to improve my English by attending the local church service. I did follow her advice with little success, but the vicar, whose attention was drawn to my regular attendance, thought I was interested in conversion and visited us. His hopes came to naught when Mutti told him the real reason for my eagerness. Inge, however, who was at an English boarding school, with services and prayers, became very receptive to the Christian faith. Hannelore, who was to start her training as a nurse soon after our arrival in England, was sent to Stoke-on-Trent for this purpose. After a further six months we received a telegram from the hospital informing us that Hannelore had to undergo an operation for appendicitis, and asking our consent. That was given at once, naturally. We were all very upset, and Mutti took the next train to be with her sick child. After a week, when the danger was over, she returned. She reported with pride that a judge, who had invited the refugees, stressed what good English Hannelore spoke.

Aunt Martha had advised Mutti to contact her acquaintance working in Bloomsbury House, to find out about good schools for Inge. The result was that Inge was sent at first to the seaside, because she looked ill, and was then sent to a private school where she stayed until the time the "blitzkrieg" ravaged London.

Meanwhile it was the 25th of June, 1940, the day after Mutti's birthday, just after the retreat of British forces from Dunkirk. Unannounced two policemen turned up and asked me to accompany them to the local police station. I would be interned!

After I packed my few belongings calmly I followed them to the police station. We Germans were to be interned, even women, because there was fear that we would be potential traitors if the Germans succeeded in invading England.

I could not conceive how they interned us Jews, when the powers-that-be must have known that we were the sworn enemies of the Nazis. Perhaps there was a feeling of not looking as if we were given preferential treatment compared to the real Germans who had lived here for a long time.

At the police station I met a number of fellow sufferers, all furious. However, I had already accommodated myself to the situation; the very same day we were transported further afield. We spent the night in a large building with straw on the ground. But I slept well. On the following day we arrived at our destination. It was a council estate which had been cleared out, Huyton, near Liverpool, where we internees were to live. It was surrounded by barbed wire and guarded by armed guards who stood on high watchtowers, where they could overlook the whole camp.

During the first few days we had to sleep in large tents on straw, and were fed there as well. Then we were accommodated in two-family houses. According to the size of the rooms, we slept in twos or threes. As I counted as one of the older ones I got a bed to myself.

Inactive as I was, the thought came to me to busy myself as a tailor. I put up a notice at our house. One of my first jobs was to mend a pair of shoes. It brought me the advantage though, that I did not have to eat in the tent any more, but in a corrugated iron barrack. One fellow sufferer had forgotten his

shaving kit. When I offered him mine willingly, he complained how unpleasant the other men had been. To show his gratitude I received stiffeners for collars, which I used for many years.

My trade brought me in so much in the four months of my internment, that I did not need any money, but actually saved some.

Apart from the young Herr Bussack from Moers I often met Herr Neumann. Herr Neumann from Essen is once more in his own business.

A few weeks after our internment some fellow internees were released on medical grounds. Although I felt extremely well, I tried my luck. I thought it best to complain of my heart. Before it was my turn to be examined I did a lot of exercises, but had to wait such a long time that I thought it wise to return to my room to repeat them. The examining doctor, who happened to be one of my customers, tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Just be grateful that your heart is in such excellent shape." After some time I tried again to be released, but without success.

The bombing raids by the German air force on England, and especially London, were horrifying, and were meant to prepare the ground for a subsequent invasion. As Holland was already occupied I counted on our account in Amsterdam being inspected by the Nazis, and in case of an invasion of England, we would be called to account for that. I wrote to Mutti for that reason. The copy of that letter is inside the English Dictionary. "Is it not a fact," I said, "that Herr Dreyfuss, the donor of our affidavit to the United States, had deposited 850 pounds sterling at the bank in Amsterdam. In turn that bank had transferred 700 pounds to Bloomsbury House as our deposit; the remaining 150 pounds were at the Westminster Bank in London." The American Consul had asked Herr Dreyfuss to guarantee our stay in the States; this he refused to do. I sent him a cable.

"Interned in a country at war, very unhappy, family in despair, only you can free us by giving the declaration demanded by the consulate."

Meanwhile, Mutti was busy trying to get a guarantee for the children, at least; she succeeded in that at last. Inge was guaranteed by Mr. D., but when Mutti came to see the consul she was very disappointed, for he declared he would not split up a family.

At the end of September we were told we would be taken to the Isle of Man. I took that opportunity to send some clothes, like coats, back. We had spent about ten days on that beautiful island surrounded by the Gulf stream, when I was informed on the eighteenth of October that I was to be released! At first I was so amazed, I thought there must have been a mistake. I had not thought any more about my previous application for failing health. I was all the more pleased when my release was confirmed.

On arrival in Liverpool I handed my suitcase to some unknown gentlemen who were travelling from the boat to the station by car. I had to report to the police station. At the station I could neither find the driver of the car, nor the passengers, nor indeed my suitcase. There was no address in the suitcase either, if I remember rightly. There was nothing left for me, after a thorough search, but to board the train for London without luggage. How surprised I was when I found only Uncle Edu at home, who told me Mutti and the children had travelled to Kempsten only a few days before.

In the camp we had been safe from bombing. I had no idea how devastatingly the blitz had raged in London, and some parts of the city where the worst fires had burned I did not even see. I was then told, to my great sorrow, what terrible weeks of danger, fear and constant upset Mutti and the children had lived through. It was lucky that near them was a very deep tube

station; you went down by lift and were absolutely safe from bombs. Inge told me later that Mutti had infected her with her own fears, and she had kept her company down there. Hannelore was not so fearful, and fled less often.

After my return I had to report to the local police station and was told I would not be allowed to leave London for a week. After that week I went to Kempsten with Uncle Edu, and was very happy to be reunited with my family. I found you all installed in the house of a bus driver on a new housing estate. I was relieved that there were no bombs there, and Mutti could sleep soundly. We shall never forget their uncontrollable terrier. When he was chained he jumped up and down on his kennel; was he let off, it happened often that he could not be found again. When the landlady became worried about him Mutti made us go on the dog search. One day the dog had swallowed a chicken bone so awkwardly across his gullet that a vet had to come to free it.

Hannelore soon found some work in a private hospital in Bedford, the nearest bigger town, which could be reached in twenty minutes by bus. Inge tried, too, to find a post as an apprentice dressmaker, and soon found a two-year apprenticeship. She used her bicycle from Germany to ride to Bedford and back four times a day, as she came to Kempsten for her meals.

In 1941 she had an accident which turned out most fortunate. Inge, while on her bicycle, was hit by a car and thrown against a wall. She was brought home and had to stay in bed for several weeks. We were extremely lucky that there were no lasting ill effects. The bicycle was, of course, a complete write-off.

I tried myself to find something to do in Bedford, but did not succeed until the spring of 1941. It was a small tailoring business, belonging to an elderly man. I started to work the following morning, but had warned the owner that I had not done any tailoring for a long time. Prior to our emigration I had thought to keep my family with alterations and repairs. Imagine

my surprise when on the first morning I was handed a jacket, cut out to get ready for a fitting. If one like me had not done anything like that for fortyfive years, one can imagine how I felt. I started, though, and when I got stuck I asked a fellow employee, who had been in that shop for ten years already, and who helped me willingly. It took me two days to get that jacket ready; later it was to take me half that time. I made mostly jackets and trousers. As I was badly paid, in spite of several verbal complaints, I finally made my point in writing, and was successful. Even so, my wages were so low that we had to include the seventeen pounds sent to us from Bloomsbury House. Mutti and Uncle Edu obtained some home work; I believe they made shopping bags.

The parcel from Huyton arrived months later, and caused pleasant surprise. In order to get my lost suitcase I gave a description to the lost property office of its outer appearance and contents. And oh joy, that too arrived back one day to its rightful ownership.

Apart from Frau Bauer and Frau Reiersbach, Dr. and Frau Reichmann lived very close to us. Herr Dr. Reichmann had been an executive civil servant in the central committee. His wife, a very well educated lady, had been a friend of Aunt Martha's. She gave private lessons to Inge. Dr. Reichmann encouraged us to make an application to the Home Office to work on our own. When we got the permit Mutti and I worked independently, without a third person, for the duration of the war. We were so relieved. We decided to return to London, as the prospects were better, and it had become quieter, too.

Some acquaintance told us about an empty flat. Mutti and Uncle Edu went to London the next day and rented that flat. It was on the second floor, and we got permission to conduct our business from there. But we were not to put a board on the door of the flat, nor the house.

Uncle Edu and Frau Bauer moved with us. In order to get customers I had one thousand business cards printed, and distributed them all over the neighborhood. As there were mostly apartment blocks it took little time; they all had lifts and in front of each door was a letter box.

One of the first jobs was to turn an overcoat for Uncle Max. Soon after the distribution of the cards the first customers arrived. We were permanently busy from then onwards. Mutti helped me most conscientiously. A lot of ladies' clothes were brought in, which I accepted, although I had never done that before. At first it happened quite often that customers paid us more than they had been asked. Later on I raised the prices, according to the increased income of the customers. Several times Mutti thought the demanded price too high. I had to go to the customers, but they would not accept any repayment. During our three years of independence we saved a considerable sum.

Meanwhile, just about a year after we moved in, the agent for the property turned up one day and gave us a shock. There had been a complaint about us, and we would not be allowed to run the tailoring business any more from the flat. I tried at once for a shop, but it was not easy to get that. We then decided to go on quietly, and never heard anything again. Mutti heard later that a kind neighbor had complained about so many people coming and going to the flat.

We most frequently saw Uncle Max and Aunt Laura. Both had married while in London. Uncle Hugo and the Weizenkorns had already emigrated once more in 1940, so had Hammerschiags and Uncle Siegfried.

Through Toni Hirsch we got to know the wife of Georg Hirsch, who ran a ladies' dressmaking business together with her sister. They were not very busy, and I advised them to have cards printed as I had done, and I distributed them for them. The result was most satisfactory.. Through Frau Hirsch Toni got to know her

husband, too. Fritz Goldschmidt, who had been called up during the war, came often to us on all his leaves, and brought army rations, too, which were much in demand.

Uncle Edu had some special treatment because of his stomach complaint, and received our own butter ration. Still, we never went hungry in spite of rationing.

Mutti suffered most from the bombing raids. As soon as the siren sounded, we fled to the ground floor, because Mutti believed herself safer. When it became bad once more in 1944, we fled back to Kempsten. I managed to find some work in Bedford again. During the last stage of the war the danger was greatest. The missiles came from the Continent, and could not be announced. Mutti was always content when evening came. I then took her and her suitcase to the same tube station where she had sought shelter during the blitz. As soon as she was in the elevator, she became calmer. In the depth, on the wide platforms, along the dividing wall, iron bedsteads had been put up, on top of each other with wire netting for mattresses. They were tightly packed to the length of five hundred meters, and always fully occupied. Even on the platform itself people camped. The rule was that people were only allowed down between the hours of 11 pm to 5 am. I therefore collected Mutti every morning early. That went on for six months. Mutti asked us to come with her, and for three weeks Inge and I spent our nights there. Hannelore, who had returned to London long before us, signed a contract with a London hospital for four years. She used to visit us on her day off. Apart from the much damaged neighborhood, a bomb fell right into the courtyard of the hospital.

Inge had gone back to school after her apprenticeship, first in Bedford, then in London. After that she had to do some war work.

Of the many green spaces that London possesses, I visited Hampstead Heath most often. You could leave the footpath and

wander across the heath and lie down. Especially when new to it I found that liberty most pleasant.

Regents Park, too, was within half an hour's walk. I still remember the tulip beds and the rose garden, so magnificent!

By far the most beautiful though was Kew Gardens, the biggest botanical garden in the world. I loved it best at the time of the rhododendrons in bloom. On both sides of the path you had them tree size in the most wonderful colors. In can still see the tropical trees with huge fruit in the greenhouses; in others water plants of such beauty that I still think of them with pleasure. Every time I came here I went to the rock gardens with the small, rare flowers in the most delightful colors.

After the end of the war Uncle Hugo asked by cable whether we still intended to come to the USA. Mutti and I were doubtful whether we should have any means of existence in England for any length of time. As the largest number of our customers were themselves refugees, most of them had already emigrated further afield. For that reason that cable caused us great joy, especially the children. Aunt Leni had managed to persuade a wealthy lady she had been nursing to vouch for us. Herr Fritz Weil gave the remaining surety.

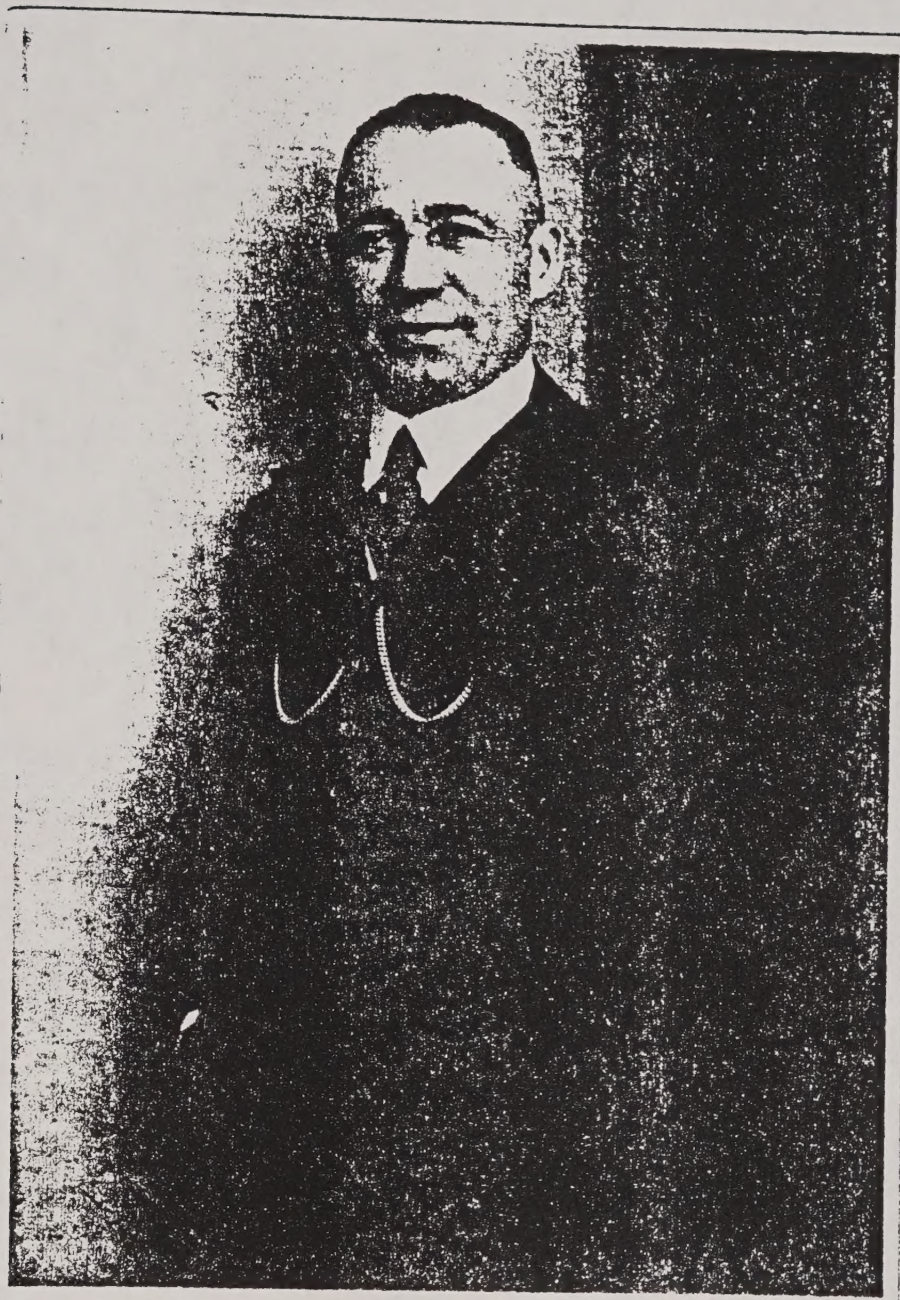
As it was difficult to get passages on boats we had decided to fly, in spite of that being much more expensive. Surprisingly, a message from Bloomsbury House offered us passages on a Swedish liner.

Now comes the worst part, that Mutti did not have the joy to come with us after all she had gone through.

About eight days before she died, Mutti complained of pains in her leg. She had a thrombosis. On doctor's orders Mutti stayed in bed for a week. After she got up for one day, she had to go back to bed. On Monday the doctor could not see any signs

of danger. The next day she found her state so worrying she called a lung specialist.

After his examination this man gave me the devastating news that Mutti's condition was hopeless. We had oxygen brought to help her breathe. Inge went to fetch Hannelore. That was Mutti's last hour.



ALEXANDER ALEXANDER

MARCH 22, 1878

MARCH 11, 1962

(ABOVE AT AGE 55 yrs.)

